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1E. O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ELAB EAID BTIO EINV ECON PGOV ZI ZCTU
SUBJECT: A CONVERSATION WITH WELLINGTON CHIBEBE

11. (SBU) Summary: After attending the International Labor Organization (ILO) conference in Geneva, Wellington Chibebe, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union's (ZCTU), talks about the ILO Conference, land nationalization, and wage negotiations. End summary.

ILO CONFERENCE

12. (SBU) Chibebe declared the ILO conference a success. Delegates sharply questioned GOZ about its labor practices even as some delegates saw positive steps in recent labor law changes. The next test will be ILO Section 87 Freedom of Association provisions.

13. (SBU) Chibebe was embarrassed by Labor Minister Mangwana's shouting and ranting about imperialists trying to re-colonize Zimbabwe and curtail the country's sovereignty. Mangwana repeatedly denounced the ZCTU as an instrument of the opposition. At one point, a GOZ representative accosted the Canadian delegation, calling them racists. A GOZ representative also threatened reprisal against the Swazi labor delegate for openly siding with ZCTU and criticizing GOZ. In the plenary session, delegates expressed disappointment with GOZ's behavior- they expected more professionalism.

LAND NATIONALIZATION

14. (SBU) Chibebe clearly stated his opposition to nationalization. He was also confused about how the announcement came out- first with an all-inclusive nationalization and then with a pared-down "only acquired land" version. Chibebe opined that GOZ would nationalize all productive farmland (with an eye towards the industrial sector afterwards). However, international and domestic criticism forced a temporary retreat. He believes GOZ will simply list all properties with productive farmland, thereby marrying the two seemingly disparate policy statements.

WAGE NEGOTIATIONS

15. (SBU) Chibebe expressed optimism about the current round of wage negotiations. Employers and employees agreed to conduct quarterly wage negotiations to keep up with hyperinflation. Some even negotiate monthly.

16. (SBU) Negotiations have been difficult, with both business and labor recognizing the need to balance the need of workers for higher wages against the need for employers to hold down costs.

17. (SBU) Some workers are currently earning as little as Z\$100K+/month while ZCTU estimates Z\$800K-Z\$1 Million as a living wage. However, average worker pay should climb to around Z\$500K by negotiations' end. Chibebe hopes the minimum will be Z\$800K by year-end.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Chibebe appeared genuinely satisfied with the ILO Conference. ILO delegates took GOZ's assault on labor seriously and GOZ's behavior did not impress the world.

19. (SBU) Chibebe believes Zanu-PF will nationalize all productive farmland in order to control their own members as well as the general population. The state technically owns properties reportedly taken by ZANU-PF bigwigs anyway, so their private interests will not deter full nationalization. Chibebe cites the recent expulsion of MP Paradza and the closing of The Tribune newspaper (Paradza was one of the owners) as evidence of ZANU-PF's desire to control its own membership.

10. (SBU) ZCTU has no immediate plans of action, other than to prepare for elections. ZCTU expects increasingly aggressive GOZ harassment as elections near. All eyes are on next year's elections. Meanwhile, Zanu-PF continues its succession battles while the opposition takes cover.

Sullivan